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There is one telling statistic in the University Equality and Diversity Unit's headline analysis of the 2023 Staff Experience Survey, a response to a question that did not appear in the 2021 iteration: that only 41% of respondents believe that action will be taken as a result of the survey.

For context, the 2023 response rate was 58% (8,980 out of 15,481 invited staff)¹; the "response rate favourability" score includes responses that "strongly agree" or "agree" with the statement in question.² In all divisions, "academics or researchers" were less likely to respond to the survey than "professional, support or research-related staff" (the terms used by the survey).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, another eye-catching change from the 2021 survey was in satisfaction with pay and benefits. There are mitigating factors: a background of industrial action, galloping inflation, and pay rises in other areas, especially the private sector. But as the summary states, while more people "feel they have a voice", "fewer are satisfied with Pay and Benefits". The results are compared to "benchmark" HEIs, but a headline figure of only 36% of staff agreeing that their pay is "fair" is alarming by anyone's standards, and a drop from 49% in 2021, 62% in 2018, and 64% in 2016 (although the question has been worded differently in some iterations). The favourability score for this question is 9% less at Oxford than comparable institutions. Drilling down into that figure, it divides into 29% satisfaction for Academics and Researchers and 44% for Professional and Support staff – both numbers are lower than in 2021.

While 83% of respondents say they are proud to work for the University (down 6% from 2021 – the Pandemic was in some ways good for team spirit), only 69% say they

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would still like to be working here in two years time. Put another way, look around the room: if there are two other people there, one of you is thinking of working somewhere else. We are, however, getting on better with each other – favourable responses to the question about "good relationships with colleagues" have risen from 90% to 92%. In that sense, Oxford continues to be a fine place to work. But in 2018, 84%

agreed that they would "recommend working in my department to a friend", whereas in 2023 only 66% "would recommend my department as a great place to work"; despite the difference in phrasing and nuance, the implications for recruitment should be clear.

The other theme that jumps out from these results is workload: only 56% of respondents agree or strongly agree that they can "strike the right balance between work and home life"; only 54% feel they can meet the requirements of the job without "regularly working excessive hours". In the 2018 survey, 73% of those who responded found their workload "reasonable". Putting these figures together – and at the risk of simplification – a clear message comes through. Staff at Oxford, particularly academic and research staff, work too hard for too little money and many have concluded that in so far as the University will continue not to address these problems they should look for work elsewhere. It is not a pretty picture for the world's number one university.

A broader question is less about the results of this survey and more about how they are being handled, how the information is being distributed. We have spoken to a number of people involved in the process. A notable degree of control is being exercised, in terms of the data itself and messaging around it. Council members have seen

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...and much more

the full results, but members of Congregation so far only have access to the headline summary, and will only receive tranches of the data, presumably accompanied by the institutional narrative, or data on a need-to-know basis (for example, data on gender disparities to those with Athena Swan responsibilities). For comparison, the full report is available for the 2018 survey³; for 2021, “Nominated central, divisional and departmental staff [were] given access to the survey reporting dashboard” and a “brief narrative report” can still be found (again, via SSO).⁴

As the accompanying narrative states, “the EDU will provide regular updates on analysis of institutional results and action planning. Divisions and departments will be encouraged to develop their own action plans [...]. Further communications throughout Michaelmas term will focus on actions that have been identified, together with communications around implementation, celebrating successes and demonstrating Change” [*sic*].

Information is being distributed, then, in limited fashion, through Divisions and departments. This seems to contrast with the more open handling of previous iterations of the survey.⁵ There are, we understand, practical reasons for this particular dissemination of data – the complexity of the survey, staff changes in key areas, for example. And there are obvious obstacles to full disclosure – granular data for smaller units (i.e. very small cohort sizes) risks revealing personal information and breaching GDPR. But it is surprising that these difficulties cannot be resolved in a way that looks less like top-down control of a message that may be uncomfortable for the institution to hear.

Congregation can boast very many people skilled at analysing statistics, reading organisational and individual behaviour, developing innovative policy and practices, and getting teams working well. These are capabilities on which to draw, not to constrain, or colleagues may well conclude that nothing will change, for all the surveys in the world.

* * *

The Staff Experience Survey will no doubt have a major influence on the thinking of the Pay and Conditions review committee, which has less than two months to report to the Vice-Chancellor on its first conclusions.

What will surprise and influence it most in the SES findings? The committee will doubtless be determined to rebut the expectation, widely held according to the SES, that concerns raised by staff will not actually be responded to in terms of real improvements. Given the context, the review has to come up with some concrete recommendations and those most be implementable if credibility is to be maintained.

Of the various concerns consistently voiced by staff – all contributing to the underlying problem of pay, family budgets and the cost of living – housing, transport and childcare feature most prominently. The particular, well-known employment conditions of fixed-term contract workers and those in casualised and college-based jobs only affect specific staff groups but their difficulties add to the more general ones and collectively we all depend on their contribution to the University’s functioning. What is noticeable about all these headline staff concerns is that it will take (presumably new) financial resource to achieve change.

But also emerging from the SES there is a completely different category of concerns among staff, most obviously expressed in the widespread complaint of overwork. What at first glance would seem to be a problem of line-management, which could perhaps be corrected by the appropriate course of management skills training, would miss the even more important sources of pressure on individuals resulting from the ever-changing societal and political demands and expectations imposed on universities and those working in them. Such issues cannot be addressed by throwing money at them, and any amount of access to training, counselling or advice on stress-relief does not identify or remedy the underlying cause.

As Rob Foley eloquently reminds us in his Notes from Ivory Flats column below, it was not always thus and our present, increasingly dysfunctional state is the result of the drip, drip accumulation of demands on our time and mental space, each step of which all too easily goes unnoticed. Those of us with long memories can attest to the relative simplicity and civility of University life in earlier times. More and more of our colleagues have no idea that things could be so different.

It will not be easy for the review committee to arrive at recommendations that address the problem of overwork and the stress, poor interpersonal relations and staff turnover that go along with it. We respectfully suggest remedial considerations that merit attention:

- The need to enhance staff involvement and a sense of collective responsibility in University policy making: in earlier times Congregation served such a role.
- The advantages of facilitating effective and transparent staff feedback mechanisms as a means of challenging and correcting unnecessary and inefficient bureaucratic and managerial processes: focus groups of concerned staff members might, for example, directly engage with University officers or Council members.
- The possible constructive benefits of encouraging new and imaginative ideas for enhancing collective understanding of policies and procedures: instituting, for example, regular opportunities for staff to observe each other’s working practices.

B.B, T.J.H

1. Slightly down from 2021, but higher than 2018, the second iteration of the Survey.

2. See <https://edu.admin.ox.ac.uk/staff-experience-survey-1>. Some questions have a “reverse favourability”, for example where a favourable response (e.g. witnessing harassment or bullying) reflects negatively on the institution.

3. Via SSO at <https://unioxfordnexus.sharepoint.com/sites/ADMN-UAS-MosaicDocumentHub/Equality%20%20Diversity%20Unit/Forms/AllItems.aspx?id=%2Fsites%2FADMN%2DUASMosaicDocumentHub%2FEquality%20%20Diversity%20Unit%2FStaff%20Experience%20Survey%202018%20Report%2Epdf&parent=%2Fsites%2FADMN%2DUASMosaicDocumentHub%2FEquality%20%20Diversity%20Unit>

4. <https://unioxfordnexus.sharepoint.com/sites/ADMN-UAS-MosaicDocumentHub/Equality%20%20Diversity%20Unit/Forms/AllItems.aspx?id=%2Fsites%2FADMN%2DUASMosaicDocumentHub%2FEquality%20%20Diversity%20Unit%2FOverview%20of%20Staff%20Experience%20Survey%20results%202021%2Epdf&parent=%2Fsites%2FADMN%2DUASMosaicDocumentHub%2FEquality%20%20Diversity%20Unit>

5. The 2021 survey results are available, behind SSO, at <https://edu.web.ox.ac.uk/ses21-results>

Maintaining public confidence in an unfair system – the case of school examination grades

ROB CUTHBERT

What do you do when the system you run is shown to be unfair, but your statutory duty is to maintain public confidence in it? You could try ignoring the critics and hope they go away. But how long can you keep it up?

The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) regulates qualifications, examinations and assessments in England. Their website explains¹ that:

“We maintain standards and confidence in qualifications in England: GCSEs; A levels; AS levels; vocational and technical qualifications; Apprenticeship end-point assessments. We’re independent of government and report directly to Parliament.”

In 2014 Ofqual were aware of some potential problems² associated with the fact that different, equally qualified, examiners might give the same script different marks – what Ofqual call “marking consistency”. They therefore carried out an extensive study for entire cohorts of GCSE, AS and A Level scripts, comparing the marks given by an ordinary examiner to comparable re-marks given by a senior examiner, these re-marks being designated ‘definitive’ or ‘true’. It was as if all the scripts had been challenged and then re-marked by a senior examiner. This led to a report, *‘Marking Consistency Metrics’*³, published in November 2016. Figure 14 in the report shows “the probability of a candidate being awarded the definitive grade for a range of units” for each of 12 subjects, where a ‘unit’ is, for example, a single paper in a multi-paper examination. Candidates’ certificates, however, show the grade awarded not for each individual paper, but for the examination as a whole, and it was not until November 2018 that Ofqual published measures of “the probability of being awarded the ‘definitive’ grade at component and qualification level” for each of 14 subjects, as shown in Figure 12 of *‘Marking Consistency Metrics – An Update’*⁴.

Both reports are careful and scholarly examinations of the evidence of marking and re-marking, explaining the various ways in which checks and balances are applied within the marking process, checks ensure that for every subject there is a limited range of ‘legitimate’ marks around a ‘definitive’ mark. The “probability of being awarded the ‘definitive’ grade at qualification level” is a measure of the reliability of a grade as originally awarded, and so Ofqual’s findings are important as regards not only the original awards, but also the processes for challenges and appeals.

Ofqual had been concerned at the rapid rise in the rate of appeals against exam grades. In 2015 there were 506,000 challenges to grades and 90,000 grades were changed⁵. Until then it had been possible to have a script re-marked, but in May 2016 Ofqual changed the rules for appeals. Ever since, appeals trigger only a check that there were no clerical errors in the assembling of marks, and that

the mark given was not ‘unreasonable’. This, as presumably intended, arrested the steady year-on-year increase in the numbers of grades challenged, and subsequently changed, as had been experienced in the early 2010s, with challenges stabilising at about 5% of awards, and grade changes at about 1% of awards (this being about 20% of challenges)^{6,7}.

Most grades are challenged via a ‘review of marking and moderation’ rather than becoming formal appeals, the latter constituting only a tiny minority of cases, with only 440 appeals at A-level in 2021-2022⁸. Nevertheless, the possibility of ‘appeal’ against a grade continued to feature strongly in official rhetoric. In addition, questions to Ofqual about the reliability of grading have too often been diverted into comments about the reliability of marking. The paucity of successful appeals is often cited as evidence of the overall reliability of and confidence in the system, with the implication that ‘re-marking’ is possible. For example, Sharon Hague, Senior Vice-President, Pearson School Qualifications said: “... fewer than 4% of GCSE grades were challenged last year. There are processes in place for schools to do that.”, and Pearson/EdExcel claimed that “99.2% of our grades were accurate on results day”⁹. But re-marking is no longer possible, save in a handful of exceptional circumstances.

It is interesting that the change to the appeal system took effect before the 2016 report was published. An Ofqual board paper, *‘Strategy and Risk Update’*¹⁰, presented on 18 November 2015, and written by Dr Michelle Meadows, contains this paragraph:

“The report on potential quality of marking metrics is complete and the findings will shortly be presented to SAG. This autumn we will be calculating a variety of metrics across GCSEs and A levels for all exam boards. Where there are differences in metrics within qualifications but across boards, we will analyse whether that is a feature of the assessment design, the data the metric is based on, or real differences in the quality of marking. We will consider whether these metrics could be aggregated to give meaningful and appropriate indicators of quality that could be published without having perverse consequences.”

If this is the *‘Marking Consistency Metrics’* report published in November 2016 then this paragraph implies that the report was in fact ready in November 2015, and Ofqual was aware of its key findings on the reliability of grades, findings that had possible ‘perverse consequences’. After that Board meeting Ofqual published a consultation on changing the appeals rules on 10 December 2015, which was then implemented in May 2016. Glenys Stacey stepped down as Chief Regulator in February 2016, to be replaced, as interim Chief Regulator, by the then Chair, Amanda Spielman, who remained in post until

the appointment of Sally Collier on 25 April 2016. We do not know what view Glenys Stacey took of the proposed change in appeals rules, but we know she was present at the Board meeting on 18 November which accepted the analysis of the ‘*Marking Consistency Metrics*’ research report which she herself had commissioned.

There is, of course, much public interest in examination standards, and regular media scrutiny of annual results to see if there has been ‘grade inflation’. A slow but steady improvement in results took place in the years before 2010. An alternative interpretation of ‘grade inflation’ is of course that overall student achievement shows real improvement against a criterion-referenced approach. However after 2010 Ofqual shifted its approach to something much closer to norm referencing. A notable feature of the 2016 and 2018 Ofqual reports on marking consistency was the exclusive emphasis on the overall pattern of results. There was, in other words, a concentration on collective ‘fairness’, comparing one cohort with its predecessors and followers, rather than fairness to individuals within one cohort.

Dennis Sherwood¹¹, an independent analyst and consultant, had been commissioned by Ofqual to study their systems in 2013 and subsequently examined the 2016 and 2018 reports. Sherwood interpreted Ofqual’s measurements of grade reliability in terms of what he called ‘fuzziness’. Fuzziness is an indication of the number of marks either side of a senior examiner’s ‘definitive’ mark that might be the ‘legitimate’ marks given by an ordinary examiner. Sherwood then suggested that Ofqual’s finding, as in the 2018 report, that the grades for, say, English and History are much less reliable than those for Maths and Physics, can be explained if the ‘fuzziness’ of the marks associated with English and History were greater than for Maths and Physics – as seems quite plausible.

Problems arise when a marking range straddles a grade boundary. If a script could legitimately be marked in a range from 38–42, but a grade boundary is set at 40, then more than one grade could result from that one script, depending on who marks it and how. Ofqual have admitted that this is the case¹²:

“...more than one grade could well be a legitimate reflection of a student’s performance and they would both be a sound estimate of that student’s ability at that point in time based on the available evidence from the assessment they have undertaken.”

The 2016 report says:

“In components where grade boundaries are close together (most likely because the assessment has not successfully spread out candidate marks), the marking consistency will have a more profound impact on the probability of being awarded the definitive grade. Thus, the wider the grade boundary locations, the greater the probability of candidates receiving the definitive grade.”

GCSEs have (since August 2017, when A*, A was changed to 9,8,7) nine grades plus unclassified, and A-levels have six plus unclassified, meaning grade widths are inevitably narrower than, for example, university degree classifications with just four plus fail. Grade boundaries are published annually, by all the examination boards – for example the Pearson/EdExcel boundaries¹³, were announced in June 2023. With narrower grade widths

there is an increased probability that large numbers of candidates will be close to a boundary. In other words, and however good the marking is, grading will not always give a ‘true’ or ‘definitive’ grade.

It was therefore not surprising that Dr Michelle Meadows, formerly Ofqual’s Executive Director for Strategy, Risk and Research, said in evidence to the House of Lords Education for 11–16 year olds Committee¹⁴ on 30 March 2023:

“It’s really important that people don’t put too much weight on any individual grade. ... I know, unfortunately, that a lot of weight is placed on particular GCSEs for progression, maths and English being the obvious ones. In maths that is less problematic because the assessment in maths is generally highly reliable. In English that is problematic. This is not a failure of our GCSE system. This is the reality of assessment. It is the same around the world. There is no easy fix, I am afraid. It is how we use the grades that needs to change rather than creating a system of lengthy assessments.” (emphasis added).

Dame Glenys Stacey, who had been Chief Regulator until 2016, was reappointed as Acting Chief Regulator after the departure of Sally Collier in the aftermath of the 2020 results, and she said in 2020¹⁵:

“It is interesting how much faith we put in examination and the grade that comes out of that. We know from research, as I think Michelle mentioned, that we have faith in them, but they are reliable to one grade either way.” (emphasis added)

We have a national system of grading which is better than 99% reliable, but only if you accept that grades are reliable within plus or minus a grade. The problem is that the key users of the grades use them more precisely than that. If you don’t get a grade 4 or better at GCSE English or Mathematics, you may be allowed to progress to educational routes post-16, but you will have to take a resit alongside your next phase of study, and will not be allowed to continue if your resit grade is still 3 or below. And if you miss out by just one grade at A-level, you may find that the university of your choice will not admit you. While the marking and grading system meets the best international standards collectively, it still contains within it much individual unfairness. That unfairness has potentially major consequences for the life chances of many students, who may miss out on their preferred university, be forced to wait a year to try again, or decide not to enter higher education at all.

Dennis Sherwood thought this was wrong, and he has studied Ofqual’s reports in depth. The cohort-weighted average reliability of the 14 subjects shown in Figure 12 of the Update report is about 75%, so on average across all subjects, all levels, all boards, and all marks, about 3 out of 4 are ‘definitive’. This means that one in four grades, as awarded, would be at least one grade higher or lower had a senior examiner marked the corresponding scripts. However this range of marks is still treated as ‘legitimate’ – so they cannot be overturned by an appeal. A B might have been an A or a C, but there was and still is nothing the candidate could do to change it. In other words, the unreliability of grading at GCSE and A-level was such that one in four grades are, in common-sense terms, wrong. He began to write about these problems, first on his personal

website¹⁶, then with a series of blogs for HEPI, and articles in the educational press.

Dennis Sherwood's analyses attracted the attention of the press, especially when exam results were announced in August. Often, however, his findings were rejected, for example in Camilla Turner's *Daily Telegraph* report of 25 August 2018, when an Ofqual spokesman was quoted as saying: 'Mr Sherwood's research is "entirely without merit" and has drawn "incorrect conclusions"' ¹⁷. The following year, on 11 August 2019, the *Sunday Times* carried an article under the headline "Revealed – A level results are 48% wrong", in response to which Ofqual complained to the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO). IPSO's finding upheld the complaint, but only on the narrow grounds that the newspaper had not made it sufficiently clear that the use of the word 'wrong' was the newspaper's, and not Ofqual's, characterisation of the research. The finding said¹⁸:

"The research published by Ofqual, which was referenced in the article, found that 52% of grades awarded by examiners in English were definitive, defined in Ofqual's report as being the same grade as would have been awarded by a senior examiner. It was not significantly misleading to report that 48% of grades could be "wrong", in circumstances where the research indicated that, in 48% of cases, a senior examiner could have awarded a different grade to that awarded by the examiner who had marked the paper. The complainant had accepted that different grades could be awarded as a result of inconsistencies in marking, but disagreed with the characterisation of the research which had been adopted by the publication. However, the Committee found that, in light of the findings about the inconsistencies in marking which had been identified in the research, it was not significantly inaccurate for the publication to characterise the findings of the research in this way. However, whilst the article had presented the term "wrong" in quotation marks, it did not make it sufficiently clear that this was the newspaper's own characterisation of the research, rather than a finding which had been made by Ofqual." (emphasis added)

Curiously, the argument Sherwood made has never been refuted. It seemed that Ofqual were content to dismiss his argument but not to contradict it. Ofqual, with its statutory responsibility to maintain public confidence in qualifications, was trying to ignore or attack stories that 'one grade in four is wrong' rather than simply refute his argument, which one might have thought was straightforward, if his analysis was truly 'without merit'. The tactics of ignore or attack might have done the trick, had it not been for Covid-19.

By 2019 Dennis Sherwood was widely known as a critic of Ofqual, a self-styled campaigner for reliable grading. In 2019 he wrote blogs in January, February, March, July, August and December¹⁹ for the Higher Education Policy Institute, whose director Nick Hillman was not only a former special adviser to David Willetts as universities minister, but also a former secondary schoolteacher with a keen interest in these issues. Nevertheless Sherwood's campaign had not gained traction, but then the pandemic took hold. School examinations could not take place in 2020 in the usual way, and government was obliged to intervene and make alternative arrangements.

At first, government made sensible noises about what might need to be done, but very soon things started to go wrong. As a close observer of government policy for higher

education I took a particular interest and it was then I became aware of Dennis Sherwood's work. Government and Ofqual produced what Prime Minister Boris Johnson later called a 'mutant algorithm' as the basis for an alternative approach to grading in the absence of exams. The algorithm did not however mutate; it was irredeemably flawed from the very start. The House of Commons Education Select Committee, chaired by Robert Halfon (later to become Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education) held an inquiry into arrangements for GCSE and A-Levels in 2020 and published an interim report, *'Getting the Grades They've Earned'*²⁰ on 7 July 2020. That prompted a joint blog by Sherwood and me on 14 July 2020²¹ arguing that much more needed to be done.

The evidence submitted to the Committee, and a careful reading of the proposed use of the algorithm, made it clear that the disaster that unfolded in August 2020 as results were announced had been built into the process. I wrote a blog just before results day in August, 'A-Levels 2020: what students and parents need to know'²², which set out how the algorithm would work, and identified the problems which would inevitably ensue. That became the most-read blog which HEPI had ever published. It was clear that most parents and very many school teachers had not understood how the process would actually work. In practice, despite government spin suggesting the contrary, teacher-assessed grades would not be used, appeals were unlikely to succeed²³, and the algorithm set up school students to compete, not with a national cohort, but with their fellow students in their school. Worse, it prescribed the pattern of results for each subject and each school cohort on the basis of the historic achievements by other students in that same school. As every schoolteacher knows, cohort abilities and performance may vary significantly from one year to the next. Exceptional individuals in 2020 would in many cases find that the algorithm would not give them the grade they deserved.

Despite widespread pressure from schools and the Education Select Committee, Ofqual steadfastly refused to disclose details of the algorithm, for fear that schools would then be able to work out the grades for all their students before results day. However they did publish some details of the basis for the algorithm in their summer symposium on 21 July 2020, which Sherwood swiftly analysed²⁴. Huy Duong, the parent of a 2020 A-level student, also analysed the Symposium information and predicted that 39% of all centre-assessed grades (CAGs) between A* and D would be downgraded, an accurate prediction which was splashed by *The Guardian*²⁵ on 7 August 2020, a week ahead of the publication of the results. (CAGs were teacher-assessed grades confirmed by the school or centre head.)

Scottish Higher results had as usual been announced a week earlier than A-level results, and their use of a similar approach to that in England provoked widespread objection and fierce criticism. The Scots government U-turned and said that centre-assessed grades would be used instead of the algorithm's outcome. This prompted panic in the English Department for Education. Secretary of State, Gavin Williamson, first announced an alternative approach, which was bound to fail, and then also capitulated, making CAGs the definitive basis for grading (the full story was covered in my 22 October blog for the Society for Research into Higher Education (SRHE)²⁶). The DfE and Ofqual had spent months trying to defend

the indefensible and cover up the inadequacies of the algorithm, but were forced in the end to adopt a solution which had the effect of maximising grade inflation, in terms of a norm-referenced approach. They were thus to a considerable extent the authors of their future misfortune – the misfortune which was entailed in bringing the overall grade distribution back to something close to 2019 levels in two stages by 2023.

It remains a mystery why Ofqual went to such lengths to conceal and defend the algorithm, even after its manifest problems and unfairness were made clear well in advance of results day. It may be that they were still trying to fix some aspects of the algorithm, but it is tempting to infer that the reason was a collective blindness to individual unfairness. Ofqual announced that their algorithm would deliver a grade distribution comparable to (but rather more generous than) other years. That might have been the case, but this time the individual unfairness flowed not only from the fuzziness involved in the grading process, but also from the peculiar assumptions built into the algorithm.

In every subject each school or centre was in effect assigned a mix of grades based on the historical achievements of the school's recent past cohorts. Grades were then allocated on the basis of the detailed ranking of students which each school was required to submit for every student in every subject. If the algorithm allowed only one A* in the school, but this year three students deserved an A*, two of them would be disappointed. Many teacher-assessed grades were overridden by the mix of grades assigned by the algorithm. The usual national competition was replaced by extremely localised contests in which individual unfairness was highly visible.

Even though the discredited algorithm was abandoned, the underlying issue of grade reliability and individual unfairness remained, and the disastrous experience of 2020 reinvigorated Sherwood's campaign. He wrote a book, *'Missing the Mark'*, which I reviewed for HEPI²⁷, setting out his arguments in detail. The absence of any refutation of his arguments seemed to be persuading more in the educational media to give those arguments the space they deserved. On 8 June 2023 I wrote 'If A-level grades are unreliable, what should admission officers do?'²⁸ for HEPI, arguing that the proper way to proceed was for universities to recognise the limited reliability of A-level grades by giving candidates the benefit of the doubt, uplifting all achieved results by one grade. This was one solution to Dr Meadows' exhortation to change the way grades are used.

Universities will, when they can, make allowances for students who just miss the grades for their offer, but in 2023 this was less likely, both because the demographics meant that numbers of 18/19 year olds were increasing, and also because the declining real value of the £9250 home fee was driving many of the most selective universities to expand numbers of international students, who pay much higher fees.

While my 8 June blog was perhaps provocative it did at least recognise the elephant in the room and suggested a way around it. I was invited, as I had been every year since 2020, to contribute a further blog to HEPI, to be published near to A-level results day. I wrote a follow-up to the June blog which advised students and parents how to respond if they had fallen short of an offer they had accepted. I submitted it to HEPI but it was not accepted. HEPI did however publish a blog by one of its trustees,

Mary Curnock Cook²⁹, on 14 August, the Monday before results day on Thursday. Curnock Cook is the widely-respected former head of UCAS. She began:

"In this blog, I want to provide some context and challenge to two erroneous statements that are made about exam grades:

That 'one in four exam grades is wrong'

That grades are only reliable to 'within one grade either way'"

She asserted that the statement 'one in four exam grades is wrong' was a 'gross misunderstanding', but then went on to say: "In many subjects there will be several marks either side of the definitive mark that are equally legitimate. They reflect the reality that even the most expert and experienced examiners in a subject will not always agree on the precise number of marks that an essay or longer answer is worth. But those different marks are not 'wrong'." In other words, exactly as argued above, and as admitted by Ofqual, more than one grade could be a 'legitimate' assessment of the outcome for an individual. Huy Duong commented on her blog³⁰:

"... a lot of this is simply playing with words ... whichever definitions of 'wrong' and 'rights' the establishment chooses to use, it is irrefutable that students are subjected to a grade lottery ... If, as the author and the establishment contend, for a given script, both "Pass" and "Fail" are equally legitimate, then for the student's certificate to state only either "Pass" or "Fail", that certificate is stating a half truth."

Curnock Cook then addressed the supposedly 'erroneous' statement that "grades are only reliable to 'within one grade either way'" – the statement made by Glenys Stacey as Chief Regulator³¹ – saying:

"Some commentators have chosen to weaponise this statement in a way that shows poor understanding of the concepts underpinning reliable and valid assessment and risks doing immense damage to students and to public confidence in our exam system."

How it is that Sherwood's analysis shows 'poor understanding' was not explained. On the contrary, he seems to have a clear understanding of what Ofqual themselves have admitted. Curnock Cook said the claim about reliability had been taken out of context, but the context is not international tests of collective grading reliability, but the way universities and individual students actually use the grades.

Curnock Cook's blog was welcomed by influential commentators like Jonathan Simons of *Public First*³², a government favourite³³ for research and PR, and some educationists such as Geoff Barton³⁴ of the *Association of School and College Leaders*. The most telling part of her comment is that talking about unreliable grades "risks doing immense damage to students and to public confidence in our exam system". Indeed it does, but the risk lies not in pointing out that the emperor has no clothes. The real risk is in not changing the system which remains unfair to so many individuals. Curnock Cook is rightly concerned about public confidence in A-level examination grades. Her blog succeeded in perpetuating in 2023 the unfairness which has characterised the grading system for

too many years. But the emperor still has no clothes, and people are beginning to notice. It is time to redress things.

Public confidence in the qualifications and examinations system is of course absolutely vital. But the need for public confidence does not mean that individual unfairness on a large scale should be tolerated and ignored. There is no shortage of possible solutions to the problems of grading unreliability, and many of them would have little direct cost. Dennis Sherwood's book offers 14 possibilities. It would inevitably mean that the users of grades, especially HE institutions, would have to take rather greater care in using grades as part of their wider assessment of the potential and abilities of candidates for their courses. That is a small price to pay for maintaining public confidence in a national system which everyone could be proud of for its fairness as well as its international standing

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Imagine

Imagine a world
Without the birds and the bees
Without polar bears and seals
Without rivers and trees

Imagine a world
Without coral reefs
Rainforests burnt to ashes
Oceans of plastic

Imagine a world
With no place to explore
Playgrounds too toxic
The Outdoors chain sawed

Imagine a world
Alive with jelly fish,
Mosquito ridden
Trans-mutant viruses that thrive

Imagine a world
Where only a few could survive
The cost to breathe
Too high, to stay alive.

Imagine a world
Without hugs and kisses
Human connection online or in sixes
Face to face – masked, screened, unseen

Now imagine a world
Vibrant as can be
Plenty for everyone
A billion species

A world made up of
The purest five elements
Of the two n four legged, the winged n finned ones
The microbial, the root, shoot and fruit ones

Imagine a restored world, as old as it is new
Connected, embodied, creative, alive
A home of hope, compassion, love and life
Of finite earthly-green and infinite sky-sea-blue.

NATASHA CHAWLA

Natasha Chawla is a DPhil candidate in the Faculty of Theology and Religion. Natasha's research examines the differing attitudes and perceptions of nature within philosophy and religions. Her thesis aims to construct an ecophilosophy based on the Indian polymath Rabindranath Tagore. In her spare time, Natasha paints, photographs, and writes poetry about nature, both human and non-human.

The future of higher doctorates

G.R.EVANS

Oxford's regulations for the award of its higher doctorates were reviewed in 2016, with new procedures in operation from 2018.¹ These are the ancient doctorates which survived as intended for established scholars who already had a substantial body of published work when Oxford created the D.Phil. in 1917, to reward graduates beginning on research.

In 2020 there were changes to the Regulations allowing former members of Congregation to apply for leave to supplicate for a higher doctorate.² The regulations of 2018 were reviewed in their turn in 2021-22 and that has prompted the suspension of applications from the present academic year 'whilst further work is undertaken to determine what the future of higher doctorates should be'.³ Applications for Cambridge's counterpart higher doctorates⁴ have not yet been subject to a similar review, asking whether the traditional rationale for such degrees still stands up, or to suspension while that is considered.

Recruiting examiners for a D.Phil. with only a thesis to read may be less difficult than finding one or more willing to read a higher doctorate candidate's entire oeuvre, but it is still not easy. Both raise similar difficulties in finding sufficiently senior persons willing to undertake the task of examiner, difficulties perhaps prompting Oxford's pause for a rethink. The title of 'Doctor' can already be confusing, because an academic doctorate is not a medical qualification and medical doctors commonly do not have an academic doctorate. If doctorates continue to be 'lower' and 'higher' confusion may be further confounded.

Should higher doctorates survive this review and if so ought there to be amendments to and clarifications of the requirements? A D.Phil. is not a stepping stone to a higher doctorate. There is no need for a candidate to gain one before aspiring to a higher doctorate. But even the standards required for a D.Phil. or Ph.D. have grown less clear in recent years. When the *Higher Education and Research Act* of 2017 came into force, dividing responsibilities between the Office for Students and UKRI, *Times Higher Education* commented that 'neither England's new regulator nor the new UK-wide body for research is likely to make PhD students a key priority'. It was feared that research students might 'fall through the cracks', while it was not clear how it could be ensured 'that the quality assessment arrangements for postgraduate students remain as strong as they have been'.⁵ OfS and UKRI have in practice focussed more on 'widening participation in postgraduate research' than on defining PhD requirements.⁶

Until early 2023 the OfS had the QAA as its 'designated quality body' and a QAA *Higher Education Credit Framework for England* dated 2021 still includes some details of the requirement for a doctorate at Level 8.⁷ This *Credit Framework* notes that a Ph.D. is not typically credit-rated though 'professional doctorates are', bearing 360 credits at Level 8. There is no Level 9 for higher doctorates, for which requirements distinguishing them from D.Phil. or Ph.D. remain largely unstated.

The list of degrees in Statute X makes no stated distinction of level between the higher doctorates and the doctorate of Philosophy and the other lower doctorates of Clinical Psychology and Engineering. Until the recent reviews higher doctorates were simply called 'higher degrees' like other graduate degrees. Cambridge does not distinguish its higher doctorates in its list of degrees except by stating that candidates for those must demonstrate 'proof of distinction'.⁸ Oxford's Statute X simply compares its own with the Cambridge counterparts for purposes of incorporation.

The D.Phil. is mostly generic, but the higher doctorates have subject titles. If higher doctorates are retained should 'higher' versions of the modern new Doctorates of Clinical Psychology and Engineering be added to the ones in Divinity, Law, Medicine, Music, Letters and Science? There is also now scope for D.Phils to involve practice as well as theory. Continuing Education offers D.Phil. courses in subjects whose students are expected to be practitioners, such as in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, offered in collaboration with the Oxford Cognitive Therapy Centre (OCTC).⁹ Its jointly-run DPhil in Evidence-Based Healthcare (with the Nuffield Department of Primary Health Care Sciences) is open to applicants who already have an MSc. in an appropriate subject.¹⁰ Should there be higher doctorates with these titles?

History suggests that such additions might prove controversial. The creation of the D.Litt and D.Sc. in 1900 prompted squabbles about precedence until it was agreed that their holders were to walk in processions behind holders of the ancient doctorates and the less ancient Doctorate of Music (as they still do). The colour of robes also proved controversial. There were even suggestions that the D.Litts should wear 'shades of violet' and D.Sc.s 'shades of yellow'.¹¹

When a Doctorate in Philosophy was mooted two indignant letters were written to the Editor of the *Oxford Magazine* in December 1916. It was understood that the reason for the proposal was 'to attract American students to Oxford'. Were students to be offered 'some form of doctorate' by lowering 'the qualifications necessary' for the D.Litt. and D.Sc.?¹² A letter from F.C.S. Schiller spoke of the danger of 'cheapening' the doctorates.¹³ He too pointed to the American market. If the new graduates had to be 'doctors' to please the Americans, what should the degree be called? Should the D.Phil. even be called a 'doctorate'? An article in the *Oxford Magazine* noted that in the Middle Ages graduates in theology and medicine tended to call themselves Masters though at Law-specialist Bologna they were 'Doctors'. Oxford settled on 'Doctor', thus for the first time having both a lower and a higher doctorate.¹⁴

The medieval antecedents of the modern 'higher doctorates' had always been taught degrees. By the nineteenth century requirements had slumped to a point where a new bishop could expect to be handed a Doctorate in Divinity

with no scrutiny of his scholarship. But Oxford began to interest itself in adding a research requirement for postgraduate Bachelor degrees. On May 15, 1885 the Medical Committee agreed that a candidate Bachelor of Medicine should submit 'an essay on some subject connected with the History of Modern Medicine', translate some classical or (approved) 'foreign' medical texts and 'read publicly a dissertation on a subject approved by the Professor'.¹⁵ Requirements for the B.Litt. and B.Sc. also began to require research. By 1896 the candidate must submit 'written dissertations, printed papers, or books' and the dissertation must be published.¹⁶

The D.Phil. therefore began as a research degree. A flurry of letters in the *Oxford Magazine* of January 26, 1917 were collectively headed '*The proposed statute for The encouragement of Oxford Research*'. On February 21, 1917, an Amendment of Statt. Tit. VI, creating a new s.V, *Of the times and exercises required for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy*, was carried unanimously by Congregation.¹⁷ *Examination Statutes* in 1917 said that examiners must be satisfied that:

'the work done by the student in his course of special study or research, as embodied in his dissertation and as tested by his public examination, constitutes an original contribution to knowledge set forth in such a manner as to be fit for publication in extenso, and is in their opinion of sufficient standard or merit to qualify him for the degree'.¹⁸

* * *

Oxford has set itself a question at a time when 'doctorates' of different kinds are multiplying in its own provision. 'Practice-based doctorates' in design, performance and the creative arts were available as early as 1996. In a study of their 'doctorateness' three principles were identified: contribution to knowledge and understanding in the field(s) of study concerned; a critical knowledge of the research methods appropriate to the field of study; an oral examination by appropriate assessors'. A list of 'competencies' was added, emphasising the importance of theoretical requirements alongside the practical.¹⁹

In the last two decades Government policy has strongly encouraged the creation of 'alternative providers' of higher education in England. The range of subjects they offer tends to be limited in number and geared to helping their students gain employment, with Business and Marketing far out in front for popularity. The House of Lords Committee reporting on the Office for Students in September 2023 found that at undergraduate degree level in Business and Management courses the 'outcomes' vary 'to quite an alarming degree'.²⁰ Also popular are Social and Health Science, Finance, Law, Tourism, Education.²¹ Alternative providers chiefly offer Higher National Certificates and Diplomas at Levels 4 and 5, though some include 'degree-level' courses at Level 6. Those without powers to award degrees themselves depend for that purpose on validation by institutions which have such powers. Those have a duty to satisfy themselves of the standards of the courses for which they are granting their own degrees.²²

Although it must in principle be possible for such a franchising arrangement to include doctorates there seems to be no known instance of that happening. Nevertheless an aspiration to grant doctorates is beginning to multiply.

With postgraduate doctoral funding introduced for English and Welsh-domiciled students on eligible courses in England or Wales in 2018-9, institutions may seek guidance on how to establish a doctorate, though 'higher doctorates' are not mentioned.²³ This expansion of the scope of doctorates seems to be influenced by the shift away from the notion that a doctorate is a way into an academic career to seeing it as a help to career advancement. For example Henley Business School, now part of the University of Reading, offering a Doctorate in Business Administration, promises that graduates will be able to 'enhance' their 'executive and professional practice' 'through the application of sound theory and rigorous research into real and complex issues in business and management' and 'further their careers'.

Another recent change is the move back to taught doctorates, perhaps encouraged by the decision in 2004 to allow institutions in England and Wales offering only taught degrees to be granted university title.²⁴ When alternative providers offer doctorates it is normally on a 'taught basis' and usually in the form of 'Professional Doctorates'.²⁵ These were described in a UK Council for Graduate Education Report of 2005 on *Professional Doctorate Awards in the UK* as awards at 'doctoral level where the field of study is a professional discipline.' There has been discussion as to whether there is a difference, or whether both 'taught' and 'professional doctorates' should be called 'practical doctorates'.²⁶

The Office for Students grants of degree-awarding powers since 2019²⁷ have been for taught DAPs only, with the exception of the University for the Creative Arts, which was granted time-limited Research DAP for three years from September 2022.²⁸ It is now offering research degrees.²⁹ Few of the 'alternative providers' have proved to have many, if any, research-active academic staff or a research culture within them. Of those which found their feet before the *Higher Education and Research Act* of 2017, BPP University, which gained University title in 2007, still has only taught degree-awarding powers. Regent's University, also with taught degree-awarding powers, states in 2023 that it is 'committed to growing its research capacity' and that its Research, Enterprise and Scholarship Strategy' included a 'review of the viability of an application for Research Degree Awarding powers'.³⁰ There is therefore some way to go before many alternative providers gain the research degree-awarding powers they would need to offer research doctorates.

With the intention of making it possible for students to gain a degree in a series of units in different universities, prompted by Government enthusiasm for Lifelong Learning,³¹ the Office for Students introduced a trial of short courses in 2021. It offered funding for providers to encourage them to introduce such courses from September 2022.³² The problem of transferability of credits continues to prove discouraging. Although the EU is working towards the creation of joint degrees, the granting of degrees in England remains essentially an exercise of institutional autonomy. Nevertheless it is sometimes possible for a doctoral student to gain credit for a period of research in another university. Cambridge allows this but not for its degrees of Bus.D (Business), Ed.D (Education) or M.D (Medicine).³³

Some publicly-funded universities have created their own higher doctorates. Two UKCGE Reports (2008 and 2013) explored the basis on which they do so but found

that they rarely granted these degrees.³⁴ This was found to be a possible consequence of a general shift away from regarding them as an important step towards promotion to a professorship.

What reason is there for Oxford to maintain its own higher doctorates now that, even if examiners can be recruited, a considerable fee has to be charged to an applicant? A good deal of work is involved for a conscientious examiner in familiarising him or herself with the full published work of a candidate and that demands adequate payment. The taking of soundings among scholars in the field faces the difficulty that they are likely also to be rivals at the level required.

As a reward for a lifetime's scholarly endeavour the practical benefit for the holder of a higher doctorate in Oxford or Cambridge, is simply the right to walk in processions in a scarlet robe, and, in Oxford, to enjoy the Creweian Benefaction.³⁵ But to abandon these historic survivals would surely bring into question the future of their award in honorary form at Encaenia. Of course Statute X does not recognise the honorary ones as degrees, but they are awarded by the Chancellor at Encaenia in the name of the University and the Committee on Honorary Degrees³⁶ reports proposed names to Congregation, whose approval is required. Would a potential honorand come forward so eagerly to receive an honorary D.Phil.?

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29. <https://www.uca.ac.uk/research/research-degrees/>

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31. *Lifelong Learning (Higher Education Fee Limits) Act* 2023 (c. 40).

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34. Stuart and Nicola Crouch, *Higher Doctorate Awards in the UK*, UKCGE, 2008, <https://ukcge.ac.uk/assets/resources/17-Higher-Doctorate-Awards-in-the-UK-2008.pdf> and Tina Barnes, *Higher doctorates in the UK* 2013, UKGC <https://ukcge.ac.uk/resources/resource-library/higher-doctorates-in-the-uk>

35. Holding a D.Litt. (and a Cambridge Litt.D. by incorporation): I raise the concerns in this article without any personal interest.

36. Council Regulations 15 of 2002, s.21.

Notes from Ivory Flats

ROBERT FOLEY

The stages of acquiescence

After a conversation with a colleague about why we seemed to have no time to get things done, and no sense of control over how we spend our time, I sent a copy of a *Notes from Ivory Flats* to him. His response was that seeing the changes laid bare, it made him realise how easy it is to just tread water, to keep afloat amid the endless administration demands, rather than to realise the scale of change and do something about them.

This led me to thinking how we have become acquiescent to our own diminution. My colleague certainly put his finger on one aspect – just too busy to stand back and see what is going on, and instead we move into an entirely reactive mode. It's impossible to start the revolution when you have 300 emails in your inbox. Lenin would never have even got to Finland Station if he had Microsoft Exchange.

Another obvious reason is that change has been slow and incremental. I doubt any of us could put a finger on when the process started. Indeed, one would be hard put to even know exactly what the process is – is it centralisation? Bureaucratisation? Managerialism? Governmental control? And each step – a new form here, another set of guidelines there, a new level of approval everywhere – is so small that it hardly seems worth making a fuss about it. It is reminiscent of the boiling frog syndrome – if a frog is placed in cold water, and the water gradually heated, it will not notice and not move. Small increments are imperceptible. Of course, the science of this is complete rubbish, and the frog, if it can, will leap out at the first opportunity after some level of discomfort. Perhaps frogs are smarter than lecturers, and we just did not notice enough to make the leap.

But, even if the change has been incremental, there can still be phases, not necessarily particular phases of actions taken by the University or policies introduced, but phases in how we responded. I found that two books provide insights into the stages of acquiescence.

The first is *Watership Down*. Talking rabbits. At one level, *Watership Down*, the novel by Richard Adams published in 1972, is a children's story of talking rabbits going on an epic journey. Having left their warren because one of the rabbits foresaw its destruction (don't ask), they undergo many risks, adventures and challenges to find a new warren where they can live a wild life. Wild as in free of the farmer, rather than partying in the burrow every night. It is a gripping tale in which one soon forgets that they are talking rabbits, and sees them as heroic and occasionally tragic figures.

A children's story, but read enthusiastically by many adults, as is often the case with the best of them. But to me, it is also an allegory for the first stage of acquiescence. The novel opens with the rabbits leaving their warren as it is threatened with destruction. On their journey they join another warren, where life is comfortable and food plentiful. But there is also the shadow of fear over it. Fiver, the

rabbit with premonitions, senses death. But most of the rabbits do not want to leave this new warren, as it is comfortable and food is plentiful. Why face all the dangers of foxes and badgers and dogs, when they are well-looked after here? Of course, it turns out the farmer is feeding them, but also culling them. There is a price for being well-looked after.

While the rabbits do leave for more adventures in search of a home, their stay at this warren is a useful allegory for how universities have changed, and in particular, how academics have acquiesced to being looked after. In the good or bad old days, depending on your point of view, academics did most of the administration. This can take many forms, and across my career I have been secretary to many committees, written screeds of minutes, set timetables, ordered colour pens, you name it. Most of my colleagues, except those who had been absolved by what I now understand is called learned incompetence, did the same. There were just many other day-to-day, or often term-to-term tasks of administration that one has had to do, some challenging, some menial, some quite adventurous, even if, sadly, my excellent paper on 'Proposed changes to the second year timetable' has had little impact on my H-index. But on the whole, they didn't take that much time, and there was considerable secretarial support.

But then the farmer came along with carrots. These jobs should really be done by administrators (no more learned incompetence), releasing academics to get on with research and teaching. And who would resist such pampering? No more writing minutes, no more investing in a paper on the best use of store rooms, just deep thoughts and slick lectures. Only a fool would turn down such progress. And so it came to pass. Admittedly, the carrots were a bit thin on the ground, and it turned out that more people were needed to deliver the few carrots, but there was a sense, and I remember it well, that somehow this was going to liberate us, make us secure. Even more, professionalism would come in to replace our amateur efforts, streamlining – bring on the efficiency – the way we operated.

Of course, it turned out to be nothing like that. While, as far as I know, there was no culling of lecturers for their meat and skin, the carrots came at a cost. Autonomy and initiative were lost, and perhaps above all else, the knowledge. Not the knowledge of how to navigate London without a sat-nav, but the knowledge of how the system worked, where the levers of power lay, who made the decisions. The beginnings of the distancing between them and us – 'don't worry, we'll look after that', rising alarmingly to 'we know best'. A shrug of the shoulders, the urge to just get on with one's own things, and ultimately, for new academic staff, total acquiescence to their place in the system, and the assumption that their agency was restricted to writing lectures and getting grants. Not that the farmers were alone – many academics recognised that

being the ones to provide the links between them and us, and to gradually morph into farmers, was the way to get on. Soon the administrators found the most efficient way to administer was to ask the academics to do the basics – fill in the time sheets, take photos of all the receipts, do the photocopying – and send them back for approval.

The second book is George Orwell's *1984*. Everyone knows the plot and characters of *1984* – Winston Smith, Julia, Big Brother, The Thought Police and Room 101. Much of *1984* has entered the public space and conversation. Many Big Brothers have been rightly or wrongly identified, and 'groupthink' is a widely used term. Room 101 became a television programme, where guests were asked to assign hated things to it. Entirely irrelevantly, I once ran a seminar series called Room 101 – speakers had to select an idea or method or model in their field that they thought should go into Room 101. They also had the opportunity to pull out of Room 101 something that they felt had been wrongly neglected. – it was a lot of fun. *1984* is a dark, often frightening picture of dystopia and totalitarianism.

I should say straight away that there is nothing dystopian and totalitarian about university life today, and while one might have issues with heads and vice-chancellors, none can really be remotely mistaken for Big Brother or Big Sister. No, the issue is again, acquiescence. Both Winston Smith and Julia are resentful of the state of affairs, and while he is ultimately prepared to do something, she is apathetic. Even Winston is cautious to an extreme. Across the whole of the society (except the proles), acceptance of one's lot – through fear and lack of thinking of what can be done – are the signatures of life in *1984* as much as the actions of the Ministry of Love.

A comparison with *1984* is perhaps a long stretch, but most academics today complain (often bitterly) about the burdens that take up so much of their time, but remain acquiescent to them. What is the point of trying to do something when the odds are so overwhelming? Even though the opportunities are there, at meetings and open discussions, few will raise their head above the parapet. Those that do are often isolated. We are all familiar with meetings where, when the dissenter is speaking, everyone else is busy looking down at their notes, avoiding any chance of guilt by association.

There are many reasons for this. The worst might be the fear of getting into trouble, of becoming known as difficult, and so reducing chances of advancement (particularly for untenured or short-contract staff) or resources. The erosion of a sense of belonging to a peer group wherever you lie in the university system has certainly played a role here.

That same enhancement of a stratified hierarchy in the academic world, especially the empowerment of managers, means that for the most part things go from the top down, not from the bottom up, and this brings a concomitant sense of compliance, of obedience. 'We have to do it, I suppose, because 'they' say so, is heard all too frequently in departmental corridors.

Above all, though – and this is not new, but enhanced by the new environment in which we work – is the fear of being ignorant. Most academics have been successful because we know a lot, and are also very good at finding things out – sadly, the school swots, probably! We like to understand how things work, whether it is the atom or the English parliament of the fourteenth century. Con-

fidence comes from knowledge and understanding, but most of us haven't a clue about what is going on in the 'upper' levels of the university. Those of us, older, working in a much more academically-led environment, did know. Some of us think we still do know, but are usually wrong! But younger colleagues, pressured by work, life and the futile pursuit for a house they can afford to buy, do not, do not have the time to find out, and if they do, discover a labyrinth of web pages with obscure information. In the end, acquiescence becomes a survival strategy.

What to do? Let Hazel – sorry, back to the talking rabbits – be your guide. When faced with a deteriorating environment – the destruction of his warren, the culling of colleagues – he had the courage and decisiveness to stand up (in a rabbit sort of way, presumably) and act. Courage – often the courage to appear an outlier – is the antidote to acquiescence. But not easy.

Three Poems by Heinrich Heine (1797-1856)

with translations by Jim Reed (TJR) and David Cram (DFC).
An appendix to their joint publication Heinrich Heine (Everyman's Poetry, 1997).

Lovely economic lady

Lovely economic lady,
House and grounds are looking proud,
All in order, stable, cellar,
And the field is neatly ploughed.

Every corner of the garden
Is now weeded, trim and neat,
Straw is threshed and used for bedding,
Covered with a spotless sheet.

But your heart and lips lie fallow;
Lovely lady. Why do you
Occupy alone your chamber
When there's ample room for two?

(Trans. TJR)

Schöne wirtschaftliche Dame

Schöne wirtschaftliche Dame
Haus und Hof sind wohl bestellt,
Wohlversorgt ist Stall und Keller,
Wohlbeackert ist das Feld.

Jeder Winkel in dem Garten
Ist gereutet und geputzt,
Und das Stroh, das ausgedroschne,
Wird für Betten noch benutzt.

Doch dein Herz und deine Lippen,
Schöne Dame, liegen brach,
Und zur Hälfte nur benutzt
Ist dein trautes Schlafgemach.

It was quite unexpected to meet them

It was quite unexpected to meet them,
Her dad and her sister and mother,
I was just coming back from an outing,
And we laughed when we saw one another.

When we talked about things we'd been doing
It was nice to find something to say.
To their eyes I looked healthy as ever,
Though her mum thought my face rather grey.

I asked after aunties and cousins,
And those boring old friends of her dad's;
Not forgetting to mention their puppy,
And the quaint little bark that he had.

Well, how was their big married daughter,
I off-handedly asked. They smiled
And they told me she's doing quite nicely
And in fact she's expecting a child.

So I made all the relevant noises
And said I was pleased as could be;
Would they pass on the very best wishes
And the warmest of greetings from me.

Then up piped her sweet little sister:
Their dear little puppy, they'd found,
Had been getting so big and aggressive,
That it needed, poor thing, to be drowned.

The little one looks like my sweet-heart;
When she smiles it is *her* that I see.
She has just the same eyes as her sister,
The eyes that meant heart-break for me.

(Trans. DFC)

Als ich, auf der Reise, zufällig

Als ich, auf der Reise, zufällig
Der Liebsten Familie fand,
Schwesterchen, Vater und Mutter,
Sie haben mich freudig erkannt.

Sie fragten nach meinem Befinden,
Und sagten selber sogleich:
Ich hätte mich gar nicht verändert,
Nur mein Gesicht sei bleich.

Ich fragte nach Muhmen und Basen,
Nach manchem langweiligen Geselln,
Und nach dem kleinen Hündchen
mit seinem sanften Belln.

Auch nach der vermählten Geliebten
Fragte ich nebenbei;
Und freundlich gab man zur Antwort:
Daß sie in den Wochen sei.

Und freundlich gratuliert ich,
Und lispelte liebevoll:
Daß man sie von mir recht herzlich
Viel tausendmal grüßen soll.

Schwesterchen rief dazwischen:
Das Hündchen, sanft und klein,
Ist groß und toll geworden,
Und ward ertränkt, im Rhein.

Die Kleine gleicht der Geliebten,
Besonders wenn sie lacht;
Sie hat dieselben Augen,
Die mich so elend gemacht.

My good sweet wife

My good, my sweet, my gracious wife,
My lovely lady, my lady love,
Prepares a heavenly morning treat,
Deep brown coffee, pure white cream.

She pours it with her own fair hand,
Laughing, smiling, teasing discreetly.
There is no distant Christian land
Where lips could laugh or smile more sweetly.

Her voice is like the sweetest sound
From those angelic choirs above
Or, here below, like fluted tones
Of nightingales in wooded shires.

Her hands are fairest lily white
Her hair unfolds in dreamy curls
That frame her perfect peach-cream cheeks,
Her charm is that of other worlds.

And then a sudden thought pops up
– God knows from where! – the smallest trim
Might make her waist that smidgeon slimmer,
Just the teeniest tiny trim.

(Trans. DFC)

Meine gute, liebe Frau

Meine gute, liebe Frau,
Meine güt'ge Frau Geliebte,
Hielt bereit den Morgenimbiß,
Braunen Caffee, weiße Sahne.

Und sie schenkt ihn selber ein
Scherzend, kosend, lieblich lächelnd.
In der ganzen Christenheit
Lächelt wohl kein Mund so lieblich!

Ihrer Stimme Flötenton
Findet sich nur bei den Engeln,
Oder allenfalls hienieden
Bei den besten Nachtigallen.

Wie die Hände lilienweiß!
Wie das Haar sich träumend ringelt
Um das ros'ge Angesicht!
Ihre Schönheit ist vollkommen.

Heute nur bedünkt es mich, --
– Weiß nicht warum – ein bißchen schmaler
Dürfte ihre Taille sein,
Nur ein kleines bißchen schmaler.

Jim Reed is Taylor Professor Emeritus of German and Fellow of Queen's.
From 1985 to 2004 refounding Editor of the Oxford Magazine.

David Cram is Emeritus Fellow of Jesus College and erstwhile University
Lecturer in General Linguistics.

Pay cuts

Sir – I have seen much written in the last eighteen months about the decline in H.E. pay in real terms. Please permit me to place on the record the pay of a Grade 3 Support Staff employee at the University over the last eighteen years.

Reaching the top of my grade in August 2004, in May 2005 my gross monthly pay (including a mandatory hour of paid over-time) was £1,356.18 (net pay £995.80). In May 2023, my gross pay (no over-time) was £2,059.58 (net £1,270.34), an increase of 51.866%.

According to the Erikas Grig (Chartered Surveyors) web-site, R.P.I. was 95.469% from May 2005 to May 2023. Therefore, my gross pay has fallen 43.603% in real terms over those eighteen years. I should be paid £2,650.91 per month to return to my 2005-equivalent rate of pay.

May this be a lesson to all University employees, young and old.

Yours sincerely,

NEIL IDEN

Oxford

Army uniforms

Sir – A small addendum to Bernard Richards' piece on the Colour Revolution in your last issue. The first synthetic dye was produced by William Henry Perkin and gave rise to the 'mauve decade' of the

TO THE EDITOR

1890s. It is a classic example of leading British science followed by deplorable exploitation. Originally it was manufactured by Pullars of Perth, but the British dye industry died and it was taken up by the Germans. When the First World War broke out and we needed to put thousands of our troops into khaki uniforms, the only source of the dye was Deutsche Farbe. Our only source of dye was Northern Ireland flax which we used to color the uniforms of

the Royal Navy. As a result at the early stage of the war we had to send in some troops in navy uniforms until our own dye industry could be ramped up.

Perkin's son also became a chemist and held the Waynflete chair of Organic Chemistry at Oxford.

Yours sincerely,

GRAHAM RICHARDS

Brasenose College

Attending lectures

Sir – Oxford University's top ranking (again!) attracts one to its smorgasbord of quality lectures. (Yes, there are restrictions: Most are just for University members, and one should have permission of the lecturer to sit in.) Those with well-defined, narrow interests may feel adequately informed about what is happening if they are on two or three well-chosen email lists. But those with broader less-defined appetites confront the impossibility of finding out

everything that's on. To that end there are "Torch", "Events Oxford University", "Oxford Talks", and "The Gazette", especially its noughth week supplement. Searching "Oxford Lecture Lists" brings up a list of links supposedly to the lecture lists of various academic units. (What sources of information do you know about? Where do you announce special lectures/advertise seminar talks?)

Years ago, a complete set of OU lecture lists could be collected for free at the OU Press bookshop at the start of each term. Now, each department decides what to reveal about itself, and many don't want departmental outsiders, even those who are members of the University, knowing their schedule of classes.

Which are the shy/secretive departments? Well, just click your way down that list of links to see which deliver a lecture list fuss-free, and which just frustrate. This term there are three new refusenik departments, together "concealing" hundreds of classes that were openly advertised in MT last year. That's a big boost to the total of classes invisible to our students, who have been told that they can attend any OU class (absent practical restraints). Those classes will not be tempting/distracting/educating you either this term.

MIT, which is also highly regarded, announced years ago a move with the opposite flow: it would make its class notes available to all! Perhaps those who rank universities don't consider departmental openness. Perhaps they should.

Could anyone really believe, as it seems some do, that we are a better university if that seat in the lecture is empty rather than politely occupied. No. We are honored for how excellently the members of the University do their jobs, not how much artificial exclusion we practice.

Yours sincerely,

B. CAIN

Linacre College

Open Letter to All Oxford University and College Staff, Academics, Students and Alumni from the Grand-daughters of Sir W.D. Ross

Sir – Encouraged by the many examples of individuals and institutions confronting their past links to slavery and seeking reparatory justice for the descendants of the enslaved, we, the grand-daughters of W.D. Ross, alumnus of Balliol, philosopher, Provost of Oriel College (1929 – 1947) and Vice Chancellor / Pro-Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University (1941 – 1947), are calling for Oxford academics, staff, students and alumni to require the University and colleges to which they belong, to form a major part of this reparatory justice movement.

In our small way, alongside campaigning for reparatory justice for the descendants of the enslaved we have decided to donate our share of any Royalties, arising since 2020, from the sale of our Grandfather's books to a project in Jamaica that seeks to address the effects of enslavement. How much more could wealthy Oxford University and its colleges do?

Following Freedom of Information requests in 2018 the Guardian estimated that the consolidated net assets of Oxford University were £3.2 billion and those of the Oxford Colleges were £5.9 billion. Colleges will have accepted gifts and bequests from people whose wealth was accumulated solely or partly from slavery. Historians tell us, at least 10% of all British wealth in the early 19th Century was derived from the slave trade and enslavement; bequests since then are almost certainly proportionately greater due to the proceeds of slavery - a crime against humanity.

Our memories of our Grandfather are of a quiet and extremely hard-working man. We know from recently discovered correspondence that he worked tirelessly behind the scenes to support causes such as ameliorating poverty, and assisting Jewish academics to escape Germany and settle in Oxford. He was one of many who recognised wrongs that needed righting and put this concern into action. We suggest even critics of his book - *The Right and the Good* - would agree that morally if not philosophically, in a civilised society, we are all subject to the prima facie duties, as defined

by him, which include the "duty of fidelity", "the duties of reparation", "the duties of justice", "the duty of beneficence" and "the duty of non-maleficence".

We believe that, if alive, our grandfather would seek to persuade Oxford University and all its colleges to do their duty and use their wealth and the immense privilege bestowed on all who study there for reparation and justice. So we ask you all to consider the history of the wealth of your University and your colleges deriving from the direct (either known or still to be discovered) and the indirect proceeds of slavery. Then, most importantly, we urge you to engage, using the intellectual power and influence Oxford wields, in creative discussions with, and fund projects for, the descendants of the enslaved, who live here in the UK and in the Caribbean, to begin, in the spirit of *reparatory justice*, to redress the harms done by enslavement and the continuing indefensible imbalance of resources.

Yours sincerely,

ROSEMARY MECKLENBURGH AND KATE PHILBRICK

Three Bagatelles

For Spuff

(5/11/97 – 12/10/2011)

Adagio con molto affetto

Your going made me wonder
at friendship so pure – unspotted with resentment,
emulation or anger or desire,
suspicion, calculation or betraying.

Companionship with no cause for ire,
trust not of child and parent (fearful collusion)
but orphan-siblings' comfort and protection
at the lit desk, or by the winter fire.

Sleep now in peace. How often I'd admire
your quickness and your softness and your candour,
seldom in malady and never straying.

Gift that I neither prized nor praised enough,
worth more to me than name, more than contentment:
rest where *I* cannot, but now long to, Spuff.

* * *

Coign of Disadvantage

Quasi allegretto

Why then Ile fit you... *Kyd*

My fragrant lilac, each clenched purple hand
ready to flower, grappling a fierce north wind
collapsed, carrying with it a root-wormed quoin.
The bradstone slab crushing my patio gravel
stared mockingly up, immovable. Builders opined
they'd have to level the whole bleeding wall
beneath my terrace, if they took on the job.

I stood perplexed, vexation warmed to rage
at my age's weakness, the wastefulness of our age.

There was an old stone-hammer deep in my shed.
I seized it, beat at the slab till the bonding fell,
then gathered each stricken block and coping-stone
and laid them, skillless-askew, to bear the rain.
My four-score life, you reconstructed ruin
patched with defensible readings, must you still
need more emending, if *you* hope to stand?

* * *

Peace that the World cannot Give

Allegro pesante

Was it the marriage brushed from him all that fine
sparkle of talk and tease? (It sank to a faint
mutter, then smoky silence). Or else the grey
retreat of youth's unaccountable contriving?
I wouldn't have greatly cared if he'd been gay
but he carried himself like a prisoner on release –
studied, watchful, treading the middle way
without riot or risk. Or if he'd seemed at ease
with her as once with us, I'd have been content.
What did he look for, lying prone on the line
one foggy freezing mid-December evening?
A friend who identified him the next day
told me, 'The look on his face was one of peace'.
Peace that passes all *my* understanding.

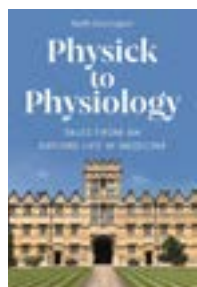
CARL SCHMIDT

Carl Schmidt was formerly Senior English Tutor and is now Emeritus Fellow at Balliol College, Oxford. His last book was *Passion and Precision: Collected Essays on English Poetry from Geoffrey Chaucer to Geoffrey Hill* (2015).

REVIEWS

An Oxford Academic life

Physick to Physiology: Tales from an Oxford life in medicine, Keith Dorrington, 2023, Profile Editions*



Keith Dorrington introduces challenging topics associated with medical practice and describes how concepts evolved as physiology advanced and how we build on the work of our predecessors. The advance of science is not always

linear and medical practices were not always based on scientific evidence. He critically evaluates the setbacks and even exposes some areas where our current practices should be revised to make the transition from “Physick to Physiology”.

This book is a demonstration of the academic environment of Oxford, which provides exceptional opportunities to combine research, teaching, and medical practice. The author had an interesting career, undertaking research in areas as widespread as engineering, materials science, anaesthesia, and cardiorespiratory physiology, while tutoring and lecturing generations of medical students, as well as practising as a clinical anaesthetist. He recounts how he was inspired by historic Oxford physicians and physiologists who explored the unknown and passed on their knowledge to future students and scholars.

We learn about the 17th-century discoveries of William Harvey, Thomas Willis, Robert Hooke and Robert Boyle, moving on to the time of John Scott Haldane, Florence Buchanan, Mabel FitzGerald, Robert Macintosh, Dan Cunningham and others. Also covered is recent collaborative work on how cells and organs sense and adapt to oxygen availability and their responses to anaesthesia conducted by Peter Robbins, David Paterson, Jaideep Pandit, Peter Ratcliffe and others. We read how Oxford evolved to provide opportunities to individuals from diverse backgrounds who could benefit from its educational, scientific, and medical training. Homage is given to benefactors, such as John Radcliffe, Lord Nuffield, and Edward Abraham whose generosity and vision sustained the scholarly communities.

The author is a respected medical tutor at University College in Oxford and an ex-

perienced anaesthetist who has been at the forefront of cardiorespiratory research. Complicated physiology is explained with great clarity. The book shows that he is exercised by various aspects of medical education, history of medical sciences, evidence-based medicine, and the future of clinical practice. When I lectured after him at our department, I often picked up and kept a paper copy of his beautifully handwritten handouts and was impressed by the clarity with which he approached challenging topics. This book reflects a wealth of experience in college tutoring, lecturing, experimental work in the laboratory, and clinical practice, combined with a sense of humour, a passion for travelling and exploration of the World and an unconditional love for Oxford.

The last chapter of the book is autobiographical but the anecdotes and personal experiences throughout the previous chapters already bring us closer to the author. He was born in the month in which Everest was first climbed, May 1953, on the day of the first successful use of a heart-lung machine. He arrived in Southend-on-Sea hospital during Alfred Lee's time in post there, who emphasized Barker's achievements in making spinal anaesthesia safe. The author is one year old in 1954 on the day when Roger Bannister ran his sub-four-minute mile around the University running track in Oxford into history. The author is eight years old when Oxford organised a centenary symposium in the honour of Haldane in 1961. At this symposium Mabel FitzGerald re-emerged into the limelight half a century after her remarkable work in the Colorado mountains. She was finally granted a University degree in 1972 at the age of one hundred, having been unable to obtain it earlier in life because until 1920 the University of Oxford did not award degrees to women. On that day the author was living next to the Bridge of Sighs but failed to notice the ambulance bringing Mabel to the Sheldonian for her degree ceremony.

Keith Dorrington has been a member of seven Oxford colleges. He was admitted to **Hertford** to study engineering, lived amongst bishops-to-be in **Wycliffe Hall** for a year, was awarded a senior scholarship at **Christ Church**, and worked on his thesis “Rubber-like elasticity in the body” while still associated with Hertford as a tutor in engineering. We learn about the unconventional way he entered medicine, initially missing biology at school, and eventually taking his O level in biology at the age of twenty-five to become a medical student at **St Catherine's College**, where Derek Bergel

was both his physiology tutor and his DPhil examiner. In 1983 he was elected to an EPA Cephalosporin Junior Research Fellowship at **Linacre College**, and in 1984 to a Nuffield Medical Fellowship at **Lincoln College**. These fellowships enabled him to gain teaching experience in medicine and physiology, and practice as a doctor. In 1989 he was appointed lecturer at the University Laboratory of Physiology (now known as the Department of Physiology, Anatomy and Genetics) and tutor at **University College**. He succeeded the respiratory physiologist Dr Daniel Cunningham and gives tribute to his work on the short-term responses of human breathing, and the circulatory system, to stimuli such as high carbon dioxide, low oxygen, exercise, and adrenaline. We can imagine how the team studied the breathing of Roger Bannister (later Sir Roger) during treadmill exercise in the laboratory.

The book has eight chapters. Each of the first seven is a carefully crafted tutorial disguised as an exciting adventure, expedition, or crime story with relevant medical and historical background. Each chapter contains a fundamental message from physiology and clinical practice, but it is delivered in a highly entertaining fashion. The book takes us to various locations on the globe; we travel to the edge of the Mont Blanc massif in the French Alps above the village of St Gervais-les-Bains, to Peru, the Colorado Peak district, Dubai, or we go to the hypoxic chamber of the Robbins Laboratory in Oxford.

Each chapter lead us on a trail that usually starts with insightful personal observations; the stories are captivating. I found myself getting hooked on the book and relating to much of what is described. Language is accessible for the general reader. Observations are explored not just from clinical and physiological points of view, but also from historical, ethical, comparative, and evolutionary perspectives. We learn that the master regulator factor mediating the cellular response to lack of oxygen is the hypoxia-inducible factor (HIF). We compare blood pressure regulation in various species, including fish and mammals. We learn that the glomus caroticus or carotid body, the structure that detects changes in the composition of arterial blood flowing through it, is found in many species. Attention is given to the lung reflex called hypoxic pulmonary vasoconstriction and we find that cows suffer from too vigorous a reflex at high-altitude while rabbits provide the most lively reflex ever seen in the laboratory.

We are also introduced to some aspects of science that are not represented in conventional publications, such as the unique personalities of patients, research colleagues and collaborators. The author names students who helped him with laboratory experiments. References to published specific scientific original literature are given for those who would like to know more, but citations are non-intrusive. Rich illustrations (52 figures, majority in colour) enliven the book. The publisher, Profile Editions, produced the book as hardback according to the highest standards for a very reasonable prize.

Criticisms of current medical practices

The author looks back at his career and asks whether anything useful was achieved and what subsequent progress has been made. He is not afraid to expose the “*topsy-turvy developments in the field*”. Each chapter provides examples of where medical science has made real progress and others where the benefits have been illusory or elusive. The author provides us with stark reminders that “*we know a lot less than we often convince ourselves we know*” – each chapter has a lesson in scientific humility. The astonishing disconnects between the recommendations based on latest experimental evidence and the widespread current clinical applications are exposed. A summary of chapters contains a few examples:

In **chapter 1** we learn that the heart–lung machine is something with both proven efficacy and contested usefulness. Cecelia Bavolet was the first survivor of its use: an eighteen-year-old with a life-threatening hole in the heart. Her surgical repair by John Gibbon of Philadelphia saw her connected to his heart–lung machine for 26 minutes. Denis Melrose, who studied medicine at University College and survived being shot in the chest by a fellow student (another student died), designed his own lung, devised a way to stop the heart beating during surgery, and helped to introduce an ‘Oxford’ lung into clinical practice. However, the author suggests that the published evidence does not show a convincing benefit of *extracorporeal lung support* (ECLS) in managing adult respiratory failure. In this usage, patients are connected for days or weeks to support their breathing. The large labour-intensive trials of this technology in adult patients have failed to convince the author of benefit, and yet the use of ECLS in the Covid-19 pandemic has become almost routine; it has been used in over 16,000 Covid-19 patients.

Chapter 2 describes the discovery of oxygen sensing mechanisms through the history of a barometer that originally belonged to Mabel Purefoy FitzGerald. She was a remarkable scientist and a strong role model for the contribution of women to science. The barometer accompanied her during the 1911 Anglo-American Pikes Peak Expedition in Colorado, which pro-

duced one of the most iconic publications in mountain physiology. She measured the relationship between atmospheric pressure and the concentration of haemoglobin using blood samples from 128 Colorado residents. Something was telling the body to produce more haemoglobin at altitude, and that something seemed to know how high the body lived. This was a key observation that started a century of investigation by Fernando De Castro, Haldane, Priestley, Peter Robbins, that eventually led to the discovery of hypoxia-inducible factor (HIF). The discovery of the mechanism of how cells sense oxygen and respond to oxygen changes earned the 2019 Nobel Prize for Physiology or Medicine jointly for William Kaelin, Gregg Semenza and Peter Ratcliffe. In 2011 another historic barometer, that of Haldane, was handed to David Paterson, the present Head of the Department of Physiology, Anatomy and Genetics, by Bob Torrance, lecturer in physiology and tutor at St John’s College. Paterson then encouraged Peter Ratcliffe to donate it to the Nobel Museum in Stockholm, where it is currently located.

Chapter 3 introduces unwelcome physiological changes associated with high altitude exploration and recounts cases of healthy volunteers and climbers who developed high-altitude pulmonary and cerebral oedema. Low oxygen induces a vigorous hypoxic vasoconstriction response in pulmonary vessels. This leads to pressures that are sometimes high enough to overwhelm the normal Starling balance of forces and hence lead to flooding of the alveoli. The author clears some misunderstandings. We do not need a layer of water on our thin capillary walls to enable gases to diffuse between the capillary blood and the alveolus. Unaided ‘passive’ Starling forces alone may not always be sufficient to keep the alveoli free of flooding. The cerebral oedema or swelling of the brain can lead to a decline of cognition, unsteadiness, lassitude, confusion, and coma. Dexamethasone can help in these conditions, and we also learn why it may have been effective in Covid-19 patients.

Chapter 4 relates that William Harvey’s “*De motu cordis*” succeeded in propagating its message particularly effectively but with limited acknowledgements to previous publications by Servetus, Colombo, Valverde, Aranzi, Ruini, Rudio, Scarpi,

Cesalpinus, and Aquapendente on the lesser and greater circulations, venal valves, and actual proofs of circulation of the blood. We learn that the butterfly needle was first used in seventeenth-century Oxford, when in 1665 Richard Lower transfused blood from the neck artery of two large dogs, into the neck vein of a smaller dog. We learn that the current standard recommended practice for blood-taking is invariably to insert a needle into a vein by pointing the needle towards the heart. However, this is the ‘wrong direction’ as the valves in the veins prevent the backfilling of the segment of vein in

which the needle is inserted and the attempt therefore often fails. The author exposes the failures of management of high blood pressure that focuses on cardiac output and vascular resistance while ignoring the kidneys. There is a case for seeing that our understanding of the function, or physiology, of the circulation may lag our appreciation of its anatomical detail.

Chapter 5 describes the development of spinal and epidural anaesthesia from the initial procedures performed by August Bier. We meet the Romanian surgeon Alexandre Fzaïcou who performed an inguinal hernia operation on himself under spinal anaesthesia involving strychnine. The story is darkened by the alarming risks to patients undertaken by another Romanian: self-publicist Thomas Jonnesco. It is a fascinating read how practice evolved and what hurdles had to be overtaken. We learn how Arthur Barker made spinal anaesthesia safe by refining the methods using a glass spine that was modelled according to the spinal curvature of a cadaver frozen in that posture. We learn how the positions, needles and the anaesthetics evolved to make this method safe and reliable with multiple and often small steps of technical developments. Mixing sugar to position the anaesthetic solutions within the spinal cistern made the procedure much safer; later Fidel Pagés and Achille Dogliotti introduced epidural anaesthesia, which we see in India permitting open heart surgery in awake patients.

Chapter 6 focuses on how anaesthetic gases, vapours and injections developed to make dosing of anaesthetics safe and effective. Initially some surgeons believed that pain and stress of surgery (without anaesthesia) helped the patient to survive the trauma. This chapter covers the history of nitrous oxide, ether, chloroform, propofol, halothane, intravenous barbiturate, and total intravenous anaesthesia. The safe prolongation of surgery depended on monitoring and regulation of doses of anaesthetics. The Oxford vaporiser for ether produced in Nuffield’s factories led to safer wartime anaesthesia. The author recounts with some alarm how, early in his career, ECG monitors were not always in use and reliance was on a finger on the pulse, as in the 19th century. The chapter looks at the current controversy over the contribution of anaesthetic vapours to global heating and concerns about post-operative cognitive impairment. Recent research of the UK National Audit Project on risk factors of accidental awareness during anaesthesia led by Jaideep Pandit revealed how total intravenous anaesthesia combined with neuromuscular blockers present almost four-fold increase in risks despite its growing popularity.

Chapter 7 talks about rubber-like ‘entropy elasticity’ in body tissues. We get a gentle introduction to thermodynamics. The relevance of properties of elastic materials is discussed in relation to arteries, lig-

aments, and skin. “Ligamentum nuchae” is known to the butcher as the “paddy-whack”. Molecules of collagen, elastin, caoutchouc-rubber and their behaviour, such as viscoelasticity, are discussed and linked to physiology and clinical work. The pioneering work of Charles Roy and Charles Sherrington on the regulation of the blood-supply of the brain is also introduced. Their work described that the brain could regulate its own blood flow according to the region’s activity, providing the foundations of modern functional imaging methods.

Chapter 8 is self-biographical and contains some very insightful observations on careers in academia, research, and clinical practice. The author talks with affection and appreciation about the history and fellowship of the colleges with which he was associated. He gives credit to tutors who spotted talent in state schools and made sure that those students were given opportunities. Oxford came some way to admit the brightest and most talented students regardless of their background or education. Dorrington, as a tutor, gives insight into how the admissions and the tutorials evolved over the years. He describes the difficulties he had to face to combine research and teaching with a clinical career. Challenges facing NHS clinicians are explained and some minor changes that could improve things outlined. The author is grateful for opportunities received and gives his appreciation to all the benefactors whose generosity keeps Oxford in motion.

Who should read this book?

This book is highly recommended to anyone who is interested in medicine, physiology, evolution of medical practices and the life of a medical tutor at Oxford. The individual tales explore lively topics encountered during a professional lifetime in Oxford. The book is a thought-provoking read; the current as well as past medical controversies are discussed in an entertaining and easy-to-read fashion. There is no need for detailed scientific knowledge.

However, the accessible style should not fool the reader; there are some very fundamental issues discussed in great depth and these stories will resonate with the reader for a long period. The eight chapters can be read in any order, but following the original sequence is advisable because of some cross referencing between chapters. The numerous historic references to Oxford make this book highly relevant for so called “synoptic” tutorials for Oxford’s third year medical students. The book is also recommended to readers interested in the evolution of medical ethics – how clinical trials work and how research results are translated to clinical practice. This book will be included in the reading lists for all our medical and biomedical students at my college.

ZOLTÁN MOLNÁR

**<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Physick-Physiology-Tales-Oxford-Medicine/dp/1800819242>*

A quick HE canter

Changing Higher Education for a Changing World. Callander/Locke/Marginson, Bloomsbury Academic, 2022



This is a quick canter in some 250 pages and 17 essays from 25 contributors over the ‘future development’ of higher education globally. In so far as the authors dare bravely to predict anything, they are very likely to get it wrong – so I’ll ignore predictions, tentatively made or firmly asserted, and just pull out just three bits that caught my attention.

First, the perceptive comment on what drives the remorseless growth of HE almost everywhere globally: it is ‘accumulating social demand for opportunities... once participation becomes the norm for middle-class families, and then all families, it keeps on growing until it reaches universal...’ (citing the work of Professor Simon Marginson, he of this Parish). And, even if expansion pushes down ‘the average private earnings attached to degrees’ or ‘the graduate premium’ erodes, the growth continues beyond anybody’s control: ‘Governments only ever increase participation rates. They never decrease them.’ (Page 5)

Second, whether the surge in the (over?) production of graduates leads to their ‘underemployment’ – the picture varies across nations, from 45% in Japan; via 27.5-35% in the UK, USA, and Canada; down to 10% in Norway, Finland, Germany. And this ‘underemployment’ is a growing problem in, say, Italy and Greece; less so in the UK, France & Spain; and not at all in Germany and Ireland. But the data used in the tables is a decade old so may tell us little about the 2020s. (Pages 180/181)

Third, the scary financial dependence of some UK universities on the flow of international students – such as the %age of total students: e.g. LSE, 68%; ICL, 52%; UCL, 45%; Manchester, KCL, Warwick, Cambridge & Edinburgh c35%; Oxford & Coventry, c33%; Nottingham & Bristol, c23%. (Page 61). And whither come such students? – China, 100k+ and then India, US & HK at 15-20k each; Nigeria at 10k. (Page 58) So, not exactly a diversified market! Perhaps the Council Members *qua* Directors of such entities need to dust off their knowledge of just how the Insolvency Act 1986 applies to a chartered corporation and to its directors in terms of their potential personal financial AND criminal liability?

DAVID PALFREYMAN

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